

Partners for a Safer and Healthier Garfield County

The smallest county in Washington State has made a big change in how their community views health—and it is making a difference. The Garfield County Health District's Healthy Communities program, funded in part by the Preventive Health Block Grant, found a strong partnership in the Community Health & Prevention Advisory Board (CHAPAB). The advisory board, originally focused on substance use, has reinvented itself and is now focused on creating a healthier Garfield County. The board was recently instrumental in establishing a Safe Routes to School program. The results of this program include repainted crosswalks, a grant for a flashing light crosswalk, a bike grant, and speed limit enforcement.

Issue

In Garfield County, approximately half of all youth don't get enough physical activity.¹ While walking to school seemed like a good solution, some elementary students had to cross a major highway to get there. Schools in Washington State are required to have a safe route for all students walking within a one mile radius; a distance that encompassed almost the entire main town in Garfield County. The need for a Safe Routes to School Program was clear.

Intervention

In 2010, members of the CHAPAB formed a Safe Routes committee that included staff from the school district, the health district, the city works manager, the sheriff's department, the prosecuting attorney, and the school transportation director. They approached the City Council to propose improved safety features such as lower speed limits, speed limit enforcement, and repainting crosswalks. The Council offered its support for safety improvements. Local law enforcement supported the effort by increasing speed limit monitoring in school zones. In 2011, the Pomeroy School District applied for and received a grant through the Washington State Traffic Safety Commission to install flashing lights on the main highway through town. They also received a Bike and Pedestrian Safety Grant from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction that changed the physical education curriculum in local schools.

Impact

The Garfield County Health District is now seen as a leader in making policy and environmental changes in the community. Their Community Health & Prevention Advisory Board has embraced the Healthy Communities model and is a strong and active partner. They revised their bylaws and continue to work for a safer and healthier Garfield County.

County population:² 2,266

Garfield County Health District
Pomeroy, Washington
<http://co.garfield.wa.us/health>

